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JESUS THE PERFECTER OF FAITH (HEB. 12 : 2).

By PROFESSOR D. A. HAYES, PH.D., S.T.D.,
Garrett Biblical Institute, Evanston, Ill.

IN a recently published volume of comments upon the Johanne epistles we read: "To speak of Jesus Christ as exercising faith is to use a diction foreign to the New Testament."¹ It is to this sentiment that this paper would take most radical and absolute exception. We believe that the man Jesus, who was the incarnate God, did exercise faith. We believe that in the incarnation he entered into all the limitations of real and genuine humanity. We believe that from beginning to end his religious life was sustained by unfailing faith in the Father's promise, providence, and power. We believe he had to live the life of faith, as every other religious man must live it. We believe that these truths are not foreign to the diction of the New Testament. On the contrary, we believe that they constitute an essential element in the teaching of both the gospels and the epistles. In almost any of the books of the New Testament we might find abundant proof of this fact. In this paper we confine ourselves to the single epistle to the Hebrews.

As a basis for our study we take the titles descriptive of Jesus found in Heb. 12 : 2, 'Αφορώντες εἰς τὸν τῆς πίστεως ἀρχηγὸν καὶ τελειωτὴν Ἰησοῦν. How shall we translate these words, "Looking away unto Jesus who is the ἀρχηγός and the τελειωτής of the faith"? The word ἀρχηγός occurs only four times in our New Testament — twice in the epistle to the Hebrews and twice in the book of Acts. The primary meaning of the word is that of "leader, chief leader, captain, or prince." It represents one who stands at the head of the line as commander or most conspicuous personage. The Authorized Version and the Revised Versions, both British and American, have chosen to give this

¹ DANIEL STEELE, *Half Hours with St. John's Epistles*, p. 131.

primary meaning to the word in both of the passages in Acts. In Acts 3:15, τὸν δὲ ἀρχηγὸν τῆς ζωῆς ἀπεκτείνετε, they translate, "But ye killed the Prince of life." And in Acts 5:31, τοῦτον ὁ θεὸς ἀρχηγὸν καὶ σωτῆρα ὑψωσεν, they translate, "This one God exalted with his right hand a Prince and a Savior." When we turn to the epistle to the Hebrews we find a strange division of opinion as to the translation of the word in the two passages there. In Heb. 2:10, τὸν ἀρχηγὸν τῆς σωτηρίας αὐτῶν διὰ παθημάτων τελειῶσαι, the Authorized Version consistently held to the primary meaning of the word and translated, "For it became him to make the captain of their salvation perfect." But the Revised Versions put the primary meaning into the margin and a secondary meaning into the text, "It became him to make the author of their salvation perfect." We hold that the Authorized Version, with its primary meaning, consistent with the use of the word in the book of Acts, is clearly the better at this point. The picture of the context is that of God bringing a great company, πολλοὺς υἱοὺς, "many sons," into glory; and all of them perfected through trial. At their head stands their Captain, their Prince, the First-Born from the dead, leading the host of the redeemed into the glory which he had with the Father before the world was. The statement made concerning him is that it behooved God to make him who was their Leader, their Captain, the Prince of their salvation, perfect through suffering. Acts 3:15 called him the Prince of life. Acts 5:31 called him a Prince and Savior. Heb. 2:10 calls him the Prince of salvation. The primary meaning would seem to be clearly the better at each point.

In the passage which we now seek to interpret, Heb. 12:2, τὸν ἀρχηγὸν τῆς πίστεως, the English versions agree in putting the secondary meaning of the word into the text, "Jesus the author of faith." But the Revised Versions have put the primary meaning as an alternative into the margin, "captain of faith." Thayer translates the word, "one who takes the lead in anything and thus affords an example, a predecessor in a matter." And then he interprets the word in this passage to mean: "Jesus who in the pre-eminence of his faith far surpasses the examples of

faith commemorated in chap. 11." That this primary meaning is the only proper meaning in this passage the whole context seems clearly to prove. There had been many glorious examples of faith in the Hebrew history. The author enumerates them at great length, beginning with Abel, Enoch, and Noah, and coming down to his own time; but then he hastens to say that, glorious as these examples are, they are subordinate and insignificant when compared with the supreme example of faith furnished by the man Jesus; and he exhorts his readers to look away from all inferior examples, all lesser lights, to their Leader, their Captain, the Prince of faith, the one who stands at the head of the host of the heroes of faith in all history. We believe, then, that the word *ἀρχηγός* ought to have its primary meaning in all of the four passages in which it occurs in the New Testament. They all represent Jesus as our Leader, our Captain, our Prince, the Prince of life, the Prince of salvation, the Prince of faith. The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews has a word which he uses for "author," or "source," or "cause." It is found in 5:9, *Ἐγένετο αἴτιος σωτηρίας αἰωνίου*, "He became the author of eternal salvation." In 2:10 Jesus is the Captain of salvation, the Leader of the many sons brought into glory, *ἀρχηγὸν τῆς σωτηρίας*. In 5:9 he is represented as the author or source or cause of salvation, and a different term is used, *αἴτιος σωτηρίας*. If in 12:2 the writer had intended to call Jesus the author of faith, would he not have used this, his term for that thought, *αἴτιος τῆς πίστεως*? He chooses the other term, *ἀρχηγός*, and represents Jesus as the Leader of the long line, the Prince of the host of the heroes of faith.

We are confirmed in this conclusion when we turn to the study of the other descriptive term found in this clause. Jesus is *τὸν τῆς πίστεως ἀρχηγὸν καὶ τελειωτήν*. Jesus is the Prince of faith. He is also the *τελειωτής* of the faith. What does this term mean? We need not go beyond the limits of the epistle itself to feel sure of our author's usage and meaning. The word *τελειωτής* itself occurs nowhere else in the New Testament, the Septuagint, the Apocrypha, or the classical Greek literature. But its cognate forms are frequent elsewhere and frequent in

this epistle. The adjective *τέλειος*, the two nouns *τελειότης* and *τελείωσις*, and the verb *τελειόω* occur thirteen times in the epistle.

In 9:11 we read that Christ came *διὰ τῆς μείζονος καὶ τελειό-τερας σκηνῆς*, "through the greater and more perfect tabernacle." This passage suggests the familiar truth that the whole epistle is concerned with the contrast between the Old and the New Dispensation, and that the author affirms that there was something unsatisfactory and incomplete about the former service and worship, tabernacle, temple, ritual, and covenant; and that what was lacking in that dispensation had been supplied by Christ. The Old Dispensation represented dissatisfaction, incompleteness, imperfection; the New Dispensation represents satisfaction, completion, perfection. All of the remaining occurrences of these allied words in this epistle easily fall into three groups which revolve about these three ideas:

1. The imperfection of the Old Dispensation. Heb. 7:11, If there was *τελείωσις*, perfection through the Levitical priesthood, what further need was there that another priest should arise? There was no perfection there. Perfection came with the New Dispensation. Heb. 7:19, The law perfected nothing, *ἐτελείωσεν οὐδέν*. Heb. 9:9, The former gifts and sacrifices were not able to perfect, *μὴ δυνάμεναι τελειῶσαι*, the worshipers. Heb. 10:1, The law can never make perfect, *οὐδέποτε δύνανται τελειῶσαι*, them that draw nigh. Heb. 11:40, They, the heroes of faith in the Old Dispensation, should not be made perfect, *μὴ τελειωθῶσιν*, without us. These five passages all emphasize the fact of the imperfection in the old system of things.

2. A second group of four passages presents the contrasted truth, that perfection is attainable by those who have accepted the Christian faith. Heb. 12:23, Ye have come to the spirits of just men who have been perfected, *τετελειωμένων*. Heb. 10:14, By one offering he hath perfected forever, *τετελείωκεν εἰς τὸ διηνεκές*, them that are being sanctified. Strong meat belongs to those for whom this work has been done. Heb. 5:14, Strong meat is of the perfect, *τελείων*. All are urged to press into this possibility of grace. Heb. 6:1, Let us be borne to perfection, *ἐπὶ τὴν τελειότητα φερώμεθα*.

3. Between these two groups of passages in the epistle, representing a scheme of salvation where perfection is impossible, and another where perfection is possible, stands a group of four passages which have to do with Jesus, and all of which represent him as perfected, and therefore the superior and Leader of all the imperfect saints who chronologically had preceded him, while at the same time he is the superior and the Leader of all the perfected saints who chronologically succeed him. The first innumerable company he leads by superiority, being perfected, as they were not. The second innumerable company, that of the perfected ones, he leads by priority, being the first of the line. Heb. 2:10, It became God, bringing many sons to glory, to make the first of that glorious company the Leader of the long line, their Captain, the Prince of their salvation, perfect through sufferings, *διὰ παθημάτων τελειῶσαι*. Heb. 5:9, Having been made perfect, *τελειωθείς*, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him. Heb. 7:28, For the law appointeth men high-priests, having infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was after the law, appointeth a Son, perfected, *τετελειωμένον*, for evermore. Last of all in this group we come to the passage which is the object of our study, Heb. 12:2. The context makes its meaning clear. There have been great heroes of faith in our history, the author says, but they were all imperfect. They belonged to a dispensation whose continuous and necessary characteristic we have shown to be its inability to bring its worshipers to perfection. Therefore look away from these imperfect examples of faith to the Perfected One. He is the Prince of faith. He is faith's Perfecter, *τῆς πίστεως τελειωτής*. Our study of the allied forms in the epistle leads to the same result. They all represent completion, perfection. All who have to do directly with Jesus represent him as the Perfected One. That, then, must be the meaning of the term, *τελειωτής*, used in this passage. Jesus has realized in himself *τὸ τέλος*, the end which faith was intended to subserve in the development of human character. He has exercised faith fully, continuously, perfectly, from the beginning to the end of his life.

As Thayer puts it, he is the one "who has in his own person raised faith to its perfection and so set before us the highest example of faith."² Stevens says: "The author calls upon his readers to follow after the 'leader and perfecter' of their faith, who has illustrated his trust in God and his pursuit of his heavenly vocation in a life which is the perfect pattern of fidelity. Thus for our author Christ is represented, not only as the object of faith, but as the perfect example of it."³ Westcott concludes: "The whole scope of the passage is to show that in Jesus Christ himself we have the perfect example — perfect in realization and in effect — of that faith which we are to imitate, trusting in Him. . . . He exhibited faith in its highest form, from first to last, and placing himself, as it were, at the head of the great army of heroes of faith, he carried faith, the source of their strength, to its most complete perfection and to its loftiest triumphs."⁴ Mason agrees in the general conclusion and affirms that Jesus "first showed what faith really was, and set a complete and faultless example of it, the contemplation of which may animate us to endure trials which have some resemblance to his own."⁵

We believe that this is one of the climaxing truths in the epistle to the Hebrews, largely lost sight of in the church of today, because of the faulty chapter division in our English Bibles which has separated the crowning example of faith, that of the man Jesus, from the long list of the heroes of faith which preceded it and were intended only to lead up to it; and also because of the mistranslation of the word *ἄρχηγός* as "author" instead of "leader or prince" in both the Authorized and Revised Versions.⁶ The Revised Versions have changed that very misleading translation of the word *τελειωτής* as "finisher"

² See *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, in *loc.*

³ *The Theology of the New Testament*, p. 499.

⁴ *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 395.

⁵ *The Conditions of Our Lord's Life on Earth*, p. 69.

⁶ It might be well to note also that the insertion of the italicized *our* in both the Authorized and Revised Versions is in a measure misleading. The Greek has the definite article. Jesus is the Prince and the Perfect Example of the faith which has been under discussion through the whole of the preceding chapter.

to "perfecter," and have thus greatly improved upon the Authorized Version at this point. Then, properly translated, the meaning of the clause we have under consideration becomes clear: looking away from all other and inferior examples of faith, unto Jesus, the Prince of faith, the Leader of the great host of the heroes of the faith, and the Consummator of faith, the Perfect Example of faith, the one who has exercised faith to the full realization of the result intended by a life of faith in the human soul. We are assured that this must be the meaning of the clause by a study of the terms themselves in their use in parallel passages in the epistle and in the New Testament, by a study of the context, and by the confirmation of the highest scholarly opinion.

We believe that this conception of the life of the man Jesus, as a life in which the exercise of faith, in the same sense in which we exercise faith, furnishes the keynote and the keystone of the character, is the conception of the epistle to the Hebrews throughout. The author of the epistle is emphatic as to the divine dignity of the Redeemer; but he is equally emphatic as to his real humanity. He says that Jesus is a brother to all believers, 2:11. He is one with them, 2:11. He shares their flesh and blood, 2:14. He is made like unto them in all things, 2:16. He is tempted in all points like as they are, 4:16. He learns obedience in gradual, human development, through the experiences of the days and the years, 5:8. He prays and supplicates with strong crying and tears in genuine human dependence upon God, 5:7. He is characterized by godly fear, like Noah or any other godly man, 5:7. He sacrifices his own will to the Father's will always; the one cry of his heart is: "I am come to do thy will, O God," 10:7. There were bright days when in the consciousness of his sonship Jesus lived in undisturbed faith and hope and love, in unquestioning dependence, obedience, and trust. Then there were dark days when he suffered under special stress and trial, in buffetings of mind and agony of soul, even unto blood, 12:4. But his faith held firm. It was tried more terribly than that of any man before him, but it was true.

As Fairbairn has said: "He had to live his personal life (1) within the limits necessary to man, and (2) in perfect dependence upon God. Had he transgressed either of these conditions, he had ceased to be man's ideal Brother or God's ideal Son."⁷ He never transgressed these conditions. Within the limits necessary to man his faith had to be constantly exercised, and his faith never failed him.

No wonder that the author of the epistle to the Hebrews exhorts his readers near the very beginning of his discussion: "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High-Priest of our confession, even Jesus; who was faithful to him that appointed him," 3:1, 2. And no wonder that here toward the epistle's close we come upon the corresponding and climaxing exhortation of the whole discussion: "Look unto Jesus, the Prince of the faith, the Perfect Example of the faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising shame, and hath sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him that hath endured such gainsaying of sinners against themselves, that ye wax not weary, fainting in your souls. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin," 12:2-4. Jesus did all of this, and therefore he is, as Stevens says, "the supreme example of unshaken trust in God. He passed through a career of the severest moral trial and proved himself victorious over evil. He endured the greatest sufferings without the slightest loss of confidence in God."⁸ "He did not know everything, else he could no more have been tempted than God could have been tempted. He grew in wisdom as he advanced in years. He learned by experience—by the things which he saw and which he suffered. He lived and wrought, as he told his disciples, by faith in God his Father, as we must all do."⁹

This is the Leader presented to us in the epistle to the Hebrews, the man Jesus, our Brother in trial, our Example in victory. He exercised faith as we exercise faith. He lived a life like ours, "full of temptations, privations, contradictions of

⁷ *Expositor*, First Series, Vol. III, p. 337.

⁸ STEVENS, *op. cit.*, p. 519.

⁹ WALKER, *The Spirit and the Incarnation*, p. 322.

unbelief, ending with death on the cross; calling into play to the uttermost the virtue of fortitude, affording ample scope for the display at all costs of fidelity to duty and obedience to God, and, in the most desperate situations, of implicit filial trust in a heavenly Father. . . . How can any son of God . . . doubt the value of a Leader so trained and equipped?"¹⁰ He was the very Prince and Perfecter of the exercise of faith in a human life.

That is the conception of the epistle to the Hebrews throughout: Jesus, one with us in disability and in sympathy, one with us in the conditions of conflict, a very Prince of faith, a Leader whom we can follow with perfect confidence because he has never known defeat, a Prince whose white plume will lead the great army of the heroes of faith to a continuous and eternal victory. In the second chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews we read that Jesus is not ashamed to call us brethren, saying: "I will declare thy name unto my brethren. And again, I will put my trust in him," Heb. 2:11-13. What does that second proof passage mean? It can mean only one thing: that the author of the epistle would represent Jesus as one with his brethren in the continuous exercise of faith, in living like them the life of faith. That was the motto inscribed upon his banner, "I will put my trust in God." That was the legend upon his Excalibur, "I have had faith in God." That was the ideal of every day's endeavor with him, "I will exercise faith in Him," 'Εγὼ ἔσομαι πεποιθὼς ἐπ' αὐτῷ, Heb. 2:13.

Our Leader said: I will be made like unto my brethren in all things. Must they live a life of faith? Are their spiritual victories to be won only by faith? Then I will live by faith. I will win my victory by the exercise of unfailing faith in every extremity and in every trial. I will take for my earthly life the same conditions in which my brethren stand, the same flesh and blood of which they partake; and I will maintain without flinching the attitude and condition of creaturely dependence upon God. It shall be true of me as of my brother, the prophet or king of old, that, living or dying, "I will exercise faith in Him,

¹⁰ BRUCE, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 103.

Ἐγὼ ἔσομαι πεποιοῦς ἐπ' αὐτῷ. "Lo, I am come (in the roll of the book it is written of me) to do thy will, O God," Heb. 10 : 7.

He was always true to that resolution. His faithfulness was severely tested. His faith was terribly tried. He was tempted, and he suffered being tempted, Heb. 2 : 18 ; 4 : 15 ; 5 : 7. But in his suffering he learned obedience, 5 : 8. Through his suffering he was made perfect, 2 : 10, the perfect Prince of salvation, 2 : 10, because he was the Prince and Perfecter of faith, 12 : 2. He was the Righteous One, who lived by the exercise of faith, 10 : 38. With good courage he always said : "The Lord is my helper ; I will not fear. What shall man do unto me?" 13 : 6. Consider the Apostle and High-Priest of our confession, even Jesus. He was faithful to Him that appointed him, 3 : 2. He was faithful in life and he was faithful in death. Consider the issue of his life and imitate his faith, 13 : 7. He was faithful in life and faithful in death ; he will be faithful for evermore. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yea and forever, 13 : 8. Look away from all inferior examples of faith and fix your eyes upon Jesus. He is the Prince and Perfect Example of the exercise of faith and of the victory won thereby. He hath sat down at the right hand of the throne of God, 12 : 2, 3.

If this is not the conception of the epistle to the Hebrews, we misread the epistle throughout. We believe that it is the conception of the epistle, as it is the conception of the entire New Testament. Jesus exercised faith. He was the Prince and Perfect Example of the exercise of it. We crown him τὸν τῆς πίστεως ἀρχηγὸν καὶ τελειωτήν. We believe that, because he was these, he could become αἴτιος σωτηρίας, the author of salvation to all those who exercise like faith with him, who was the incarnate God, who is the exalted Christ.